

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7060
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA POUCH
AMCONSUL CALI POUCH
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN POUCH

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EO 11652: NA
TAGS: PINS, PINT, CO
SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THE LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION CONFIRMED JULIO CESAR TURBAY AS THE PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND SOLE LEADER. TURBAY'S EFFORTS TO APPEAR ON TELEVISION WITH THE LIBERAL PARTY'S GRAND OLD MAN, EX-PRESIDENT ALBERTO LLERAS, MAY BE UPSET BY THE DECREE WHICH REGULATES APPEARANCES BY CANDIDATES. THE CONSERVATIVE BETNACUR'S IMAGE AS A "NATIONAL CANDIDATE" WAS STRENGTHENED BY AN ENDORSEMENT FROM THE SMALL CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY. CONTINUED THREATS TO PUBLIC SECURITY COULD PROMPT INCREASED MILITARY COUNTERMEASURES. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBERAL CONVENTION PROCLAIMS TURBAY AS PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND SOLE HEAD. THE LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION OF MARCH 17 MADE OFFICIAL JULIO CESAR TURBAY'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY, AUTHORIZED HIM TEMPORARY POWERS AS THE PARTY'S SOLE
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LEADER, AND APPROVED A CAMPAIGN PLATFORM. TURBAY'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH AND THE CAMPAIGN DOCUMENT CONTAINED NO DEPARTURES FROM THE ANNOUNCED GOALS OF THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION AND DID NOT TOUCH FOREIGN POLICY THEMES. IN THE SPEECH TURBAY EXTENDED A CONCILIATORY HAND TO HIS RECENT OPPONENTS FOR THE CANDIDACY, NOTWITHSTANDING "AN ANONYMOUS AND INSIDIOUS CAMPAIGN OF DEFAMATION" AGAINST HIM "WITHOUT PRECEDENT, THAT DID NOT STOP AT THE NATIONAL

BORDERS BUT REACHED THE DOORS OF THE FOREIGN PRESS, GOVERNMENTS AND EMBASSIES." COMMENT: TURBAY APPEARED TO HAVE THE PROCESS OF PARTY REUNIFICATION WELL UNDER WAY; PRESENT AT THE CONVENTION WAS A LARGE NUMBER OF FORMER SUPPORTERS OF TURBAY'S CHIEF ANTAGONIST FOR THE NOMINATION, EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS, WHO DESCRIBED THEIR ATTENDANCE AS THE "FIRST STEP" IN THEIR REINTEGRATION INTO THE TURBAY-DOMINATED PARTY. THE FINAL STEP WILL PROBABLY BE AT THE NEXT PARTY CONVENTION, WHICH TURBAY IS REQUIRED TO ANNOUNCE BETWEEN THE JUNE 4 ELECTIONS AND THE AUGUST 7 PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION. THAT CONVENTION WILL ELECT THE PARTY'S PERMANENT DIRECTIVE BODIES IN WHICH LLERAS' SUPPORTERS WILL EXPECT TO BE REPRESENTED. THEIR DEGREE OF REPRESENTATION IS LIKELY TO DEPEND ON THE QUALITY OF THEIR SUPPORT FOR TURBAY DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.

3. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES DEBATE UTILIZATION OF TELEVISION TIME. LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JULIO CESAR TURBAY AVOIDED THE CHALLENGE OF A TELEVISION DEBATE WITH CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE BELISARIO BETANCUR AND PROPOSED TO SHARE HIS GOVERNMENT-ALLOTTED TELEVISION TIME WITH FORMER PRESIDENT ALBERTO LLERAS, A DISTANT RELATIVE OF TURBAY'S ERSTWHILE OPPONENT AND THE "GRAND OLD MAN" OF THE LIBERAL PARTY. SUCH AN APPEARANCE BY THE HIGHLY-RESPECTED LLERAS ALSO WOULD CONSTITUTE A STAMP OF MORAL APPROVAL FOR TURBAY. BETANCUR, WHILE ACCEPTING HIS OPPONENT'S DECISION, DERIDES TURBAY'S ALLEGED NEED FOR ASSISTANCE. THE MATTER WAS COMPLICATED BY THE COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER'S OPINION THAT TURBAY COULD NOT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SHARE HIS TELEVISION TIME BECAUSE THE APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENT DECREE PROVIDES SPACE ONLY FOR ACTUAL CANDIDATES AND NOT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES. IN THIS REGARD, BOTH INDEPENDENT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE RETIRED GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR AND TROTSKYITE SOCORRO RAMIREZ SUBMITTED OVER 50,000 SIGNATURES IN ORDER TO QUALIFY UNDER A DECREE PROVIDING EQUAL TELEVISION TIME FOR CANDIDATES WITHOUT CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATION.

4. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS SUPPORT BETANCUR CANDIDACY. THE SMALL CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY, IN A STATEMENT ISSUED BY ITS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, ANNOUNCED ITS SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATIVE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BELISARIO BETANCUR. ALTHOUGH ENDORSEMENT BY THE WEAK CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS WILL CONTRIBUTE FEW VOTES DIRECTLY TO BETANCUR, IT DOES STRENGTHEN HIS CLAIM OF BEING A "NATIONAL CANDIDATE" WHICH MIGHT GIVE HIM A BROADER POPULAR APPEAL.

5. PUBLIC ORDER. PEKING-ORIENTED EPL GUERRILLAS ATTACKED AN ISOLATED VILLAGE IN CORDOBA DEPARTMENT, KILLING ONE POLICE GUARD, WOUNDING ANOTHER, AND STEALING SUPPLIES. AN UNCONFIRMED PRESS REPORT CITES UNIDENTIFIED DEFENSE MINISTRY SOURCES IN MAINTAINING THAT, IN RESPONSE TO THE RECENT UPSURGE IN RURAL GUERRILLA ACTIVITY, THE MILITARY IS PREPARING A LARGE SCALE OFFENSIVE

AGAINST THE GUERRILLAS, SIMILAR TO THE MAJOR, PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL
OPERATION CONDUCTED AGAINST THE ELN IN 1974. EMBASSY SOURCES
HAVE NOT CONFIRMED THE REPORT. THE ARMY'S TREATMENT OF DEMON-
STRATING STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN STRIFE-TORN BARRANCABERMEJA,
IN WHICH APPROXIMATELY FIFTY DEMONSTRATORS WERE INJURED, WAS
HARSHLY CRITICIZED BY THE LOCAL CATHOLIC BISHOP. THIS DEMONSTRATION
WAS RELATED TO THE NATIONAL TEACHERS STRIKE, WHICH BEGAN ON MARCH 17
AND WHICH INVOLVES AN ESTIMATED 180,000 TEACHERS WHO ARE DEMANDING
HIGHER PAY AND THE ABROGATION OF THE EDUCATION CODE.
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